

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

**January 15, 2001
MEETING NO. 01-02**

APPLICATION: HDC02-0207

DATE FILED: December 21, 2001

**OWNER/
APPLICANT:** Dr. Edward Halpern

ADDRESS: 103 S. Adams Street
Rockville, MD 20850



PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: The Rockville Academy faces east on South Adams Street at its intersection with West Jefferson Street. It was built for use as a private school in 1890 and replaced an 1812 rectangular brick federal-style school. The Rockville Academy is located in the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District and the building and surrounding grounds (Jacquin Trells Williams Park) are on the National Register of Historic Places. It is in the O-2, Transitional Office zone. The property was purchased by the Rockville Methodist Church in 1966 and the church has retained ownership of a strip along the west border for a paved parking lot. The building was purchased and renovated for office use by Dr. Halpern in 1980, but the east front and south “L” shape of land is owned by the City of Rockville and is a public park.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS AT THIS ADDRESS:

TXC98-0115	Painting, carpentry, gutter work, approved 4/21/98
HD-2-92	Removal of damaged Tulip Poplar, approved 1/7/92
HD-23-91	Installation of Green Mountain Sugar Maple, stone plaque holder and Plaque, approved 9/24/91
HD-21-91	Pruning three trees, removal of poison ivy from tree, approved 9/24/91
HD-19-91	Removal of rock wall or replacement of growth on wall with English Ivy, Approved 9/24/91
HD-226-90	Remove Sugar Maple tree, approved 3/20/90
HD-133-85	Street address placement on front lintel of porch, denied 9/17/85
HD-121-85	Free-standing business sign and attached building identification sign, withdrawn 4/16/85
HD-117-85	Cast iron identification plaque with a brass plate, approved 3/19/85
HD-76-82	Picket fence to screen trash barrels and heat pumps, approved 9/21/82

HD-64-81	Repair/replacement of existing porch and doors, reconstruction of rear stairs and shed, construction of new parking lot, approved 6/17/81
M-28-80	Rezoning of property from R-90 to O-2, M&C approved 5/18/81
U-318-67	Parking space for church at 112 W. Montgomery Ave, approved 12/13/67

REQUEST:

The Applicant requests a Certificate of Approval to replace wood steps in the front of the building with concrete steps. The porch decking would remain wood and the dimensions and design of the steps would not change.



STAFF COMMENTS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. *Historic, archeological, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.*

For more than 100 years the Rockville Academy educated the young men of Montgomery County, earning a reputation as the seat of learning for future leaders. The original (1812) school building on the site was razed in 1890 and some of the old materials were used in building the new structure the same year. This later structure was designed by local builder Edwin West. The entry façade which faced north toward West Jefferson Street in the original building was changed to front the newly cut through Adams Street. The north 20x40-foot wing occupies the site of the original 1812 building. No new cellar was dug underneath this section and at least one wall of the old structure (or the reuse of the old brick) is evident in the basement stairwell. The Rockville Academy is a landmark building with a prominent hilltop location set back from the right-of way. After it was discontinued as a private school in 1915, it was used as a public primary school, a public library, nursery school, and is now used for dental and counseling offices.

2. *The relationship of the exterior architectural features of the structure to the remainder of the entire structure and to the surrounding area.*

The Rockville Academy is a roughly “L”-shaped, common bond, brick 2 ½ -story Queen Anne structure. The east (front) five-bay façade consists of the 2-bay south wing, a three-story one bay tower, and two-bay front-facing gabled end of the north wing. The south wing has one window in each bay, first and second story. The tower is accessed by six wooden steps with plain stick and rail balustrade which is continued on the porch. The porch is sheltered by a flat-roofed portico in the form of a massive architrave supported by two square columns at the front and half columns at the façade. The rebuilding of the north block to the same dimensions as the old building may account for the unusual arrangement of the east (front) façade. The tower projects eight feet from the wall plane on the left side but only four feet on the right, gabled side. HDC approval was given to rebuild the front porch in 1981 as per original.



Front steps and entrance at Rockville Academy

3. *The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used.*

As with his residential and church buildings, architect Edwin West provided decorative interest in the Rockville Academy building with contrasting materials of brick, stone, tin roofing and wood shaped shingling. The original steps and front porch were likely constructed of wood, although they have been rebuilt. Steep wooden steps in the rear of the building were approved in 1981 along with rebuilding the front porch and steps. The steps in both the front and back of the building are painted the same dark red color. Concrete walkways were approved in 1981 and the bottom front step is also made of concrete material.



View of existing front steps



View of rear steps reconstructed in 1981

4. *To any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.*

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The existing wood steps are in good condition and replacement is not warranted. However, the Applicant is concerned that the wood steps are slippery in bad weather. Staff recommends that alternative solutions to the safety issues be explored versus replacement with concrete. The rear steps appear to be a greater safety concern if they are used regularly because they are so steep.